

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3736
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 19978

USEEC
E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EEC, PINT, PEPR, FR
SUBJECT: EC PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: A FIRST CUT

SUMMARY. MICHEL DEBRE CHOSE THE HISTORIC DATE OF JUNE
18 (THE 38TH ANNIVERSARY OF DE GAULLE'S RADIO APPEAL
FROM LONDON) TO WARN THE FRENCH NATION AGAINST THE
POTENTIAL DANGERS OF THE EC ASSEMBLY. BY DRAWING IN
HIS OWN DRAMATIC WAY THE PUBLIC'S ATTENTION TO THIS
ISSUE, DEBRE FIRED THE STARTING GUN FOR A DEBATE
WHICH WILL LAST THE BETTER PART OF A YEAR. ON THE FACE
OF IT, THE RPR (DEBRE'S PARTY) AND THE PCF (EVEN MORE
HOSTILE TO THE EC) WILL FACE A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE IN
THESE ELECTIONS, WHILE THE GISCARDIAN GROUPING (UDF)
AND THE SOCIALISTS SHOULD BENEFIT FROM THEIR PRO-EURO-
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PEAN REPUTATIONS AND PROGRAMS. SOME OBSERVERS EVEN
GO SO FAR AS TO SEE THESE ELECTIONS AS AN ISSUE WHICH
WILL BRING THE UDF AND PS CLOSER TOGETHER IN PRACTICAL
TERMS, AND ANOTHER STEP CLOSER TO THAT MYTHICAL GOAL
OF A CENTER-LEFT GOVERNMENT. ON BOTH SCORES, THE TRUTH
IS MUCH MORE COMPLICATED. END SUMMARY.

1. DEBRE THE PROPHET: DEBRE'S SPEECH WAS FULL OF GAULLIAN OVERTONES, COMING AS IT DID ON JUNE 18 AND GIVEN AT A VILLAGE NEAR COLOMBEY-LES-DEUX-EGLISES. DEBRE, THE LONE CLAIRVOYANT, SOUGHT TO ROUSE THE REST OF THE NATION, WHICH IS ASLEEP TO THE EXTERNAL DANGER FROM AN ANGLO-SAXON DOMINATED EC, AND TO WARN IT OF THE LONG-TERM DANGER OF AN EC PARLIAMENT, COMMISSION, HIGH COURT DICTATING THEIR TERMS REACHED BY MAJORITY VOTES TO A FRANCE WHICH HAS UNWITTINGLY GIVEN UP TOO MUCH OF HER SOVEREIGNTY. HIS CLARION CALL - OR UNCERTAIN TRUMPET - WILL BE PURSUED BY THE COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE AND UNITY OF FRANCE, A GROUP HE SET UP A YEAR AGO TO ORGANIZE PUBLIC MEETINGS AROUND THE COUNTRY TO SENSITIZE THE PUBLIC TO THE QUESTION.

2. DEBRE -- THE IMPACT: THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER REPRESENTS LITTLE MORE THAN HIMSELF, SAY MANY; HE IS THE FAR RIGHT OF A PARTY WHICH IS ALREADY SUFFERING FROM A RIGHTIST IMAGE AND PRETENDS IT IS NOT EVEN A PARTY AT ALL BUT RATHER A MOVEMENT (RASSEMBLEMENT) OF ALL FRENCH PEOPLE. BUT HIS DETRACTORS WERE WRONG LAST YEAR WHEN DEBRE SINGLE-HANDEDLY TURNED CHIRAC AND THE RPR AROUND DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON EUROPE AND ALMOST BROUGHT DOWN THE BARRE GOVERNMENT. THEY WERE EVEN MORE WRONG WHEN DEBRE LED THE FIGHT AGAINST THE EUROPEAN DEFENSE FORCE OVER 20 YEARS AGO
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AND KILLED THAT IDEA ON THE FLOOR OF THE FRENCH ASSEMBLY. THEREFORE, DEBRE, TINY MINORITY THAT HE IS TODAY, CANNOT BE DISMISSED, NOR CAN THE NATIONALISTIC SENTIMENT HE TOUCHES IN MANY FRENCHMEN. THIS IS PARTICULARLY FELT WITHIN THE RPR ASSEMBLY GROUP, AS WAS SEEN LAST YEAR.

3. CHIRAC'S DILEMMA: JACQUES CHIRAC, WHO DOESN'T NEED ANY MORE PROBLEMS AT THE MOMENT (PARIS 19790), IS STUMPED ON HOW TO PLAY THE EC ELECTIONS ISSUE AND EMBARRASSED BY DEBRE'S INITIATIVE. CHIRAC'S PROBLEM WAS CANDIDLY ADMITTED TO US THE OTHER DAY BY RPR SECRETARY GENERAL ALAIN DEVAQUET, WHO SAID DEBRE WOULD COST THE RPR VOTES IN THE EC ELECTIONS. CHIRAC IS STUMPED BECAUSE HIS PARTY IS HORRIBLY DIVIDED ON

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THE ISSUE, WHILE THE THREE OTHER PARTY GROUPINGS
APPEAR RELATIVELY UNITED. THE RPR RANGES FROM PRO-
EUROPEAN SYMPATHIZERS OF CHABAN-DELMAS, TO MIDDLE-OF-
THE-ROAD FOLLOWERS OF OLIVIER GUICHARD, TO UNDECIDEDS
AND FINALLY TO DEBREISTS WHO ARE VIOLENTLY OPPOSED.
THE THREAT TO THE COHESION OF THE RPR, WHICH HAS UP
TO RECENT MONTHS BEEN AMAZINGLY FREE OF INTERNAL DIS-
SENSION, IS OBVIOUS TO ALL. THE WHITTILING AWAY OF
THE PREEMINENT POSITION OF ITS PRESIDENT IS EVEN MORE
OBVIOUS TO CHIRAC. NEITHER CHIRAC NOR THE RPR COM-
MISSION CHARGED WITH WRITING A POSITION PAPER SEEMS TO
HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF HOW TO RECONCILE THE DIFFERENT
FACTIONS AND PRESENT AN APPEALING PLATFORM TO THE
ELECTORATE NEXT JUNE. BUT TWO THINGS ARE SURE. FIRST,
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THE RPR HAS TO MARK A PROGRESS OVER ITS MARCH 1978
SCORE OF 23 PERCENT IF IT IS TO MAINTAIN ITS PRETEN-
SIONS OF REACHING 30 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE AND
ONE MILLION CARD-CARRYING MEMBERS BY 1981.

DEVAQUET WAS QUICK TO DENY OUR SUGGESTION THAT THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS WILL INFLUENCE THE RPR'S PROSPECTS IN THE 1981 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION -- A SURE SIGN OF HIS WORRY THAT THEY WILL. AND SECOND, DEBRE'S ACTION WILL NOT MAKE CHIRAC'S RECONCILIATION EFFORTS ANY EASIER. CHIRAC CANNOT ISOLATE DEBRE, FOR THE LATTER ACTS AS A SEAL OF GAULLIST LEGITIMACY FOR THE RPR, AT A TIME WHEN MANY OTHER BARONS (CHABAN, PEYREFITTE, GUICHARD) HAVE EITHER LEFT OR DISTANCED THEMSELVES FROM THE RPR. NOR CAN ONE EXPECT THE PROPHET TO MELLOW.

4. THE UDF -- GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN: THE GOAL FOR THE UDF IS SIMPLE: CAPITALIZE ON AN ISSUE WHICH IS FAVORABLE TO IT TO (A) COME OUT AHEAD OF THE RPR IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, (B) AHEAD OF THE PS IF POSSIBLE, BUT IN ANY CASE (C) DEMONSTRATE THAT THE GROUPING WHICH DEDICATES ITSELF TO PROMOTING THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM IS GROWING AND WILL BECOME THE MAIN POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTRY DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM(S) OF GISCARD. GETTING THERE WILL OBVIOUSLY NOT BE SO SIMPLE. THE UDF HAS BEEN AMAZINGLY SUCCESSFUL (AND LUCKY) SINCE ITS FORMATION SIX MONTHS AGO, BUT THAT PERIOD IS HARDLY LONG ENOUGH TO SAY IT HAS WITHSTOOD THE TEST OF TIME. IN ADDITION TO HAVING WEAK ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES, THE UDF HAS THE INHERENT HANDICAP OF ANY FEDERATION WHICH SEEKS TO RECONCILE RIVAL LEADERS AND DIVERGING PARTY PROGRAMS. THIS PROBLEM IS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT DEPUTIES

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WHO REPRESENT THE CONSTITUENT PARTIES OF THE UDF BELONG TO DIFFERENT GROUPS IN THE EC ASSEMBLY. NOBODY CAN SAY FOR SURE IF THE GISCARDIAN CEMENT WILL HOLD OR WHAT CONTENTIOUS ISSUE WILL PROVE TOO GREAT A STRAIN.

5. AT THE PRESENT TIME, THE CENTRISTS (CDS) ARE OUT FRONT AS THE MOST PRO-EUROPEAN OF THE THREE COMPONENT PARTIES, WHILE THE GISCARDIAN REPUBLICAN PARTY (UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF FOREIGN TRADE MINISTER DENIAU) IS ACTIVELY STUDYING THE QUESTION AND THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS SILENT. CDS PRESIDENT LECANUET HAS HINTED THAT HIS PARTY MIGHT PUT FORWARD A SEPARATE LIST IF THE UDF PROGRAM IS NOT PROGRESSIVE ENOUGH AND IF THE CDS DOES NOT GET A FAIR SHAKE ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE ELECTION LIST. THE PR AND RS WILL NO DOUBT MATCH THE CDS'S ANTE FOR BARGAINING PURPOSES, WITH THE RESULT THAT FOR THE UDF TO CONTINUE AS IT HAS FOR SIX MONTHS AN EQUILIBRIUM WILL HAVE TO BE FOWND AMONG THE THREE PARTIES. THE TASK OF CUTTING THE LITERALLY

HUNDREDS OF SELF-DECLARED CANDIDATES DOWN TO THE 81 AVAILABLE PLACES WILL NOT BE EASY. NOR WILL THE SELECTION OF THE APPROXIMATELY 22 TOP NAMES FOR THE LIKELY EVENTUAL WINNERS. THE POTENTIAL FOR SPLITS, DEFECTIONS AND SEPARATE LISTS WILL PROBABLY BE GREAT. ONE UNIFYING IDEA SUGGESTED BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE UDF IS TO COOPT PRIME MINISTER BARRE TO HEAD THE LIST. BUT THIS DECISION HAS THE DISADVANTAGE OF MAKING HIM APPEAR MORE PARTISAN THAN HE NOW DOES AS THE NOMINAL LEADER OF THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY. BARRE REFUSED THE DIRECTION OF THE UDF DURING THE PRE-MARCH CAMPAIGN PERIOD; AND IN THE ABSENCE OF MARKEDLY WORSE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RPR (CHIRAC) AND THE UDF (GIS-CARD), HE WILL BE INCLINED TO CONTINUE THIS POLICY.

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6. THE PS: CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES: THE PS STARTS OUT WITH A FAVORABLE PREJUDICE, BENEFITING FROM A GENERALLY PRO-EUROPEAN (EVEN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ON THIS

ISSUE) REPUTATION AMONG MUCH OF THE FRENCH PUBLIC. BUT THE CURRENT STATE OF ITS INTERNAL DEBATE AND RIVALRIES IS HARDLY CONDUCIVE TO PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF A UNIFIED, EFFECTIVE PARTY. THESE DIVISIONS HAVE COME TO LIGHT ON MANY ISSUES, INCLUDING EUROPE WHERE LINES ARE STILL DRAWN BETWEEN (A) PRO-EC FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SFIO, (B) THE MORE SUSPICIOUS NEWER CONVERTS TO THE PS WHO CAME FROM THE CFDT, PSU AND ECOLOGY MOVEMENTS AND (C) THOSE IN THE CERES WHO ARE OUTRIGHT HOSTILE TO THE EC IDEA. EVEN THOSE WHO ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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INTERESTED IN WORKING IN AND WITH THE EC (MITTERRANDISTS, MAUROYISTS AND ROCARDISTS) DIFFER IN THEIR RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC EUROPEAN QUESTIONS, AND THIS ISSUE COULD WELL TURN INTO A WEAPON IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY (PARIS 18932). NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE SAME KIND OF INTERNAL COMPETITION WHICH EXISTS WITHIN THE UDF FOR HIGH PLACES ON THE LIST IS PRESENT IN THE PS.

7. THE PS WILL BE FACED WITH TWO OTHER PARTICULAR PROBLEMS: MARGINAL LISTS AND MRG PLANS. GIVEN THE VERY GENEROUS TERMS SET BY THE GOF FOR FORMING A LIST, THERE MAY WELL BE A PLETHORA OF MARGINAL GROUPS WHICH DECIDE TO RUN IN THE HOPE OF ATTAINING THE 5 PERCENT NECESSARY TO WIN REPRESENTATION. THESE GROUPS INCLUDE ECOLOGISTS, CONSUMERS, PSU, FEMINISTS, THE FAR LEFT, ETC.; ALL OF THEM HAVE THE CHARACTERISTIC OF DRAWING MORE FROM THE PS THAN THE OTHER PARTIES, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE PCF WHICH WILL BE HURT BY THE FAR LEFT. THE MRG REPRESENTS MORE THAN A MARGINAL GROUP, AT LEAST 2-3 PERCENT ON THIS ISSUE, BUT ITS CONTINUED COOPERATION WITH THE PS IS FAR FROM ASSURED (PARIS 18381). IF IT FEELS IT STANDS A CHANCE OF WINNING 5 PERCENT NATIONALLY OR IF IT FEELS IT IS BEING SHORT-CHANGED ON LIST POSITIONS BY ITS BIGGER PARTNER, IT MAY OPT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL ROUTE AS THE ONE GOOD (MAYBE LAST) CHANCE TO REVIVE THE PARTY AND SAVE IT FROM GRADUAL ATOMIZATION.

8. THE PRIMARY CONCERN OF THE PS AT THIS POINT IS TO ARRIVE AHEAD OF THE PCF. THIS GOAL WILL BE MOST DIFFICULT TO ATTAIN, DESPITE THE PARTY'S FAVORABLE PREJUDICE, IF IT CONTINUES ITS INTERNAL

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BICKERING, DOES NOT RECEIVE AT LEAST SOME SUPPORT FROM MARGINALS AND CANNOT COUNT ON THE MRG'S 2-3 PERCENT. OBVIOUSLY, THE PARTY'S FATE WILL DEPEND LARGELY ON THE ROLE MITTERRAND DECIDES TO PLAY IN THE EC ELECTIONS. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT HE WILL CONVINCE HIMSELF THAT HIS NAME AT THE TOP OF THE PS LIST IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN STAVE OFF THE PCF CHALLENGE. HE COULD ALSO SEE THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PS AS GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF THE PARTY'S UNIFIER, CONCILIATOR AND MEDIATOR, AS HE HAS DONE SO OFTEN IN THE PAST. BUT THIS DECISION FOR JUNE 1979 CANNOT BE DISASSOCIATED FROM THAT CONCERNING THE PARTY'S CANDIDATE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 1981. AS FAR AS ANYONE CAN TELL NOW, MITTERRAND HAS NOT MADE UP HIS MIND ABOUT RUNNING IN 1981 (PARIS 16757).

9. THE PCF -- UNDERSTANDABLY SILENT: THE PCF HAS BEEN TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS OWN INTERNAL DEBATE TO AFFORD ITSELF THE LUXURY OF AGONIZING OVER SUCH A DISTANT PROBLEM. IT KNOWS IT WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME MOBILIZING ITS ELECTORATE ON AN ISSUE OF SECONDARY INTEREST AND IT SEEMS TO BE BUYING TIME UNTIL THE SITUATION CLARIFIES ITSELF. PCF STATEMENTS DURING THE LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGN AND ITS ACTIONS SINCE THEN, HOWEVER, GIVE A HINT OF ITS FUTURE POSITION. IT WILL NOT BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS, AS IT DID EC PARLIAMENTARY PARTICIPATION IN THE EARLY YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE. THE PCF IS MOST RESERVED ABOUT THE COMPETENCES OF EC ORGANS AND WILL CAMPAIGN FOR THEIR STRICT INTERPRETATION; BUT IT WILL TRY TO GET AS MANY MEMBERS

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ELECTED AND BE IN A POSITION TO "FIGHT FROM WITHIN".
IT WILL ALSO PRESENT ITSELF AS THE ONLY TRUE DEFENDER
OF FRANCE'S NATIONAL INTERESTS, AT THE SAME TIME
ATTACKING THE PS FOR COLLABORATION WITH THE SUPRA-
NATIONAL SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. IN THIS WAY, THE PCF
WILL HOPE TO RECONCILE ITS HOSTILITY TO THE GENERAL
IDEA OF THE EC WITH ITS CAMPAIGN TO WIN AS MANY SEATS
AS POSSIBLE. THERE IS AMPLE LEEWAY IN ITS POSITIONS
TO DATE TO BE ABLE TO DO SO. ITS SUDDEN CHANGE OF
POSITION ON THE EC LAST YEAR (AS ON THE FORCE DE
FRAPPE AND ON DEFENSE POLICY GENERALLY) WAS COUCHED
IN GENERAL ENOUGH TERMS TO MEAN ALMOST ANYTHING TO
ANYONE. IT MEANT FACING UP TO REALITIES TO PRO-
GRESSIVES IN THE PARTY, STOPPING THE EC DEAD IN ITS
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TRACKS TO CONSERVATIVES, WHILE LEAVING THE
ISSUE VAGUE OR CONFUSED TO THE MAJORITY OF THE PARTY
WHICH WAS LESS CONCERNED. THE PCF WILL BE ABLE TO USE
PARALLEL ARGUMENTS AGAIN, WHEN THE TIME, :9.3 , TO MAKE
THE BROADEST APPEAL POSSIBLE -- NOT ONLY TO MEET THE
PS CHALLENGE BUT GIVE IT A RUN FOR ITS MONEY.

10. CONCLUSION: THE ELECTIONS ARE A LONG WAY OFF, AND
WE ARE NOT PREDICTING ANY WINNERS YET, EVEN THOUGH THE
UDF AND PS LOOK LIKE THE EARLY FAVORITES. EACH OF THE
FOUR MAIN PARTIES COULD RUN INTO UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS
AS THE CAMPAIGN UNFOLDS NEXT FALL. TO MENTION JUST
ONE, FRENCH VOTERS MAY TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY, IN WHAT
IS CONSIDERED IN NATIONAL TERMS AS AN ELECTION OF
SECONDARY IMPORTANCE, TO EXERCISE A "PROTEST VOTE"
AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IN POWER -- PARTICULARLY IF
BARRE'S ECONOMIC PLAN BECOMES MORE UNPOPULAR. THIS
POSSIBILITY POINTS UP ANOTHER UNPREDICTABLE FACTOR:
ABSTENTIONS. ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH ELECTO-
RATE IS INDIFFERENT TO THE ISSUE. THIS FIGURE WILL

CERTAINLY COME DOWN AS THE CAMPAIGN MOVES AHEAD, BUT THE LESSON OF THE POMPIDOU REFERENDUM OF 1972 ON UK ENTRY (NEARLY 40 PCT ABSTENTIONS) DOES NOT GIVE ROOM FOR OVEROPTIMISIM IN REACHING THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THE STAKES WILL BE HIGHER THIS TIME THAN IN 1972. MANY, PARTICULARLY THE PARTY LEADERS, WILL LOOK ON THE EC ELECTIONS AS A DRY RUN FOR THE PRESIDENTIALS OR AT LEAST, SINCE THEY WILL BE DECIDED BY PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, AS THE BEST POLL TO DATE ON WHERE EACH PARTY STANDS IN THE COUNTRY. THE RESULTS WILL BE INTERPRETED AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR PAST POSITIONS IF THE PARTY COMES OUT WELL (PCF ATTACKS ON THE PS, PS
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EMPHASIS ON ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY, UDF'S SYMBIOSIS WITH GISCARD, RPR REJUVENATION) OR CONVERSELY AS A REJECTION OF THESE SAME THEMES.

11. IF THE RESULTS LEAVE THE PARTIES MORE OR LESS WHERE THEY WERE IN MARCH, IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT GISCARD WILL EMERGE ONCE AGAIN AHEAD OF THE PACK AS THE SOLE POLITICIAN UNSCATHED BY THE MELEE. HE COULD INTERPRET THIS RESULT (AND ALL THE MORE SO AN ADVANCE BY THE UDF) AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF HIS POLICY OF INCREASED DIALOGUE WITH THE LEFT (PARIS 19199) RATHER THAN A REITERATION OF THE STATUS QUO. GISCARD WOULD THUS BE GIVEN ANOTHER ENCOURAGEMENT TO STEP UP HIS EFFORTS FOR A CENTER/LEFT CONSENSUS, REDUCING IN THE PROCESS THE STRENGTH OF THE RPR AND PCF. IT HAS EVEN BEEN SUGGESTED THAT ELEMENTS OF THE TWO RADICAL PARTIES (RS AND MRG) MIGHT OVERCOME THE CONSTRAINTS OF THEIR PRESENT ALLIANCES AND FORM A JOINT LIST, THUS BREAKING THE TWO SIDED (MAJORITY/OPPOSITION) AND FOUR-SIDED (UDF, RPR, PS, PCF) POLITICAL LOG-JAM AND SCRAMBLING THE SCENE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO INCREASE GISCARD'S ABILITY TO TAKE OTHER, NEW INITIATIVES. THESE SCENARIOS ARE OBVIOUSLY TOO PROSPECTIVE TO EVALUATE CONCRETELY. THE LEAST THAT CAN BE SAID IS THAT THERE WILL BE INTENSIVE MANEUVERING BY AND WITHIN ALL THE POLITICAL FORMATIONS STARTING NEXT FALL TO GAIN MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE INTERNALLY ON AN ISSUE OSTENSIBLY DEALING WITH FOREIGN POLICY.

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